

Private sector to build and operate Highway 407

By **PAUL MITCHISON**
Special to *The Champion*

For sale: The right to build and own two new highway extensions, one existing highway, and the right to charge drivers for using all of it.

A press conference was held recently in Burlington, announcing — not for the first time — plans to have the private sector build a user-pay Highway 407.

But members of the Mike Harris government were on hand to argue that this latest initiative will lead to a better deal for taxpayers than a proposal originally announced a few years ago by the former NDP government.

Rob Sampson, Minister without Portfolio with Responsibility for Privatization, said the latest method gets the job done faster and cheaper for taxpayers, and boosts the economy.

"The highway will be sold through a fair, open and competitive process designed to gain maximum value for the province — we will proceed with the sale only if certain conditions are met," said Mr. Sampson. "Our intention is to have the private sector extend the length of Highway 407 at no cost to taxpayers."

The Halton portion involves a 24-kilometre extension of the QEW and Highway 403 juncture in Burlington, to Highway 407 Central from Highway 403 and Ninth Line on the Mississauga-Milton border.

Some design, property acquisition and construction has been completed, and major interchanges at each end are partially built. It's expected the project would help ease congestion and reduce wear on the QEW and Highway 5

Joyce Savoline, Halton regional chair, said she wants the long-delayed project to happen as quickly as possible, and welcomed the announcement.

"If this process is going to take a long time, then we have some

grave concerns," she said. "I know the private sector can get things done quickly and efficiently."

Officials at the press conference refused to speculate on when the tender would be awarded and when construction is likely to begin.

Ho Wong, Manager of Transportation Services for Halton Region, said the best Halton officials can hope for is to have the area portion of project built by the year 2001.

But if it's a private-sector project, he said, it's important that the toll structure is low enough that it diverts traffic from the already overburdened Toronto-bound routes.

"If the tolling is in public hands, like it is now (in the completed portion of the 407 Express Toll Route), the public interest might be better served than if the tolling structure is entirely within the private sector," said Mr. Wong. "In private hands they might only have an interest in retiring debt, rather than in diverting traffic."

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Dateline

Tuesday Mar. 3

Milton Toastmasters holds its annual International Speech and Evaluation Contest at the Royal Canadian Legion at 7:30 p.m. Contact Las Polcz at 878-1394 for more information.

Tuesday Mar. 3 - 4

Cultural Interpretation Training Sessions run from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. at Glen Abbey Recreation and Aquatic Centre, located at 1415 Third Line in Oakville. Contact the Halton Multicultural Council at 842-2486 for more information.

Wednesday Mar. 4

Registrations will be taken for September at the **Hornby Co-operative Nursery School's open house** from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Morning and afternoon classes are available. For more information, call 878-5211.

Thursday Mar. 5

Overeaters Anonymous meets every Thursday at 10 a.m. at Bethel Christian Reform Church on Hwy. 7 in Acton. Call 878-1039 or 878-2545 for more information.

The **Canadian Federation of University Women, Milton and District**, holds its next general meeting at Hugh Foster Hall at 7:30 p.m. Dr. Kin Chung, acupuncturist, will be the guest speaker. New members are always welcome.

Friday Mar. 6

Enjoy a **ham dinner** at St. Paul's United Church from 5 to 7 **•see DATELINE on page 17**

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